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EXPLAINER

News | Armed Groups

Who are Haiti's gangs and what do they want? All you need to know

Haitian armed groups have grown more autonomous, experts say, and force alone will not resolve the growing security crisis.



Haitian gang members sit together in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on March 11 [Ralph Tedy Erol/Reuters]



By Jillian Kestler-D'Amours



13 Mar 2024

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Haitian armed groups have [dominated global headlines](#) in recent weeks, as gunmen attack police stations, prisons and other institutions in the capital of Port-au-Prince, effectively paralysing the city.

But the power of these gangs has long rocked daily life and politics in Haiti, plunging the country into a years-long crisis.

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Haiti crisis explained, as prime minister steps down

The latest example came this week, as Prime Minister Ariel Henry [announced](#) he would resign his post once a transitional presidential council is established and a successor chosen.

His announcement came amid pressure from both the international community and gang leaders, who warned that the Caribbean nation could face "civil war" if Henry, an unelected official, did not step down.

Henry's planned departure, however, has done little to temper the [grip of the gangs](#), which control around 80 percent of Port-au-Prince.

They have also promised to oppose any outside intervention in Haiti's affairs. That includes an effort backed by the United Nations to send a [multinational armed force](#), led by Kenya, to Haiti to help the national police respond to the widespread violence and unrest.

But who exactly are Haiti's armed gangs? How do the gangs function, and what do they want? And ultimately, how can — and should — the country handle them? Here's what you need to know.

Who are Haiti's armed gangs?

There are [believed to be](#) about 200 armed gangs operating in Haiti, about half of which have a presence in Port-au-Prince. In the capital, there are two major gang coalitions.

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The first — the G9 Family and Allies alliance, or simply G9 — is led by [Jimmy “Barbecue” Cherizier](#), a former Haitian police officer who is under UN and United States sanctions for his involvement in Haiti’s violence.

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The second is GPep, led by Gabriel Jean-Pierre, also known as Ti Gabriel. He was the leader of a gang called Nan Brooklyn before the creation of G-Pep, which has been based in Port-au-Prince’s impoverished Cite Soleil district.

G9 and GPep have been rivals for years, [battling for control](#) of neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince. Both groups have been [accused](#) of mass killings and sexual violence in areas under their authority, as well as in districts they want to take over.

But Cherizier has said that the two groups reached a pact late last year — dubbed “viv ansanm” or “live together” in Haitian Creole — to cooperate and oust Henry, the prime minister.

“We are not sure how much this dynamic will last,” said Mariano de Alba, senior adviser at the International Crisis Group. “But they formed a joint alliance in September 2023, basically trying to respond to the possibility that a multinational security mission was [going to be deployed](#) to Haiti, and they wanted to prevent that.”



Haitian gang leader Jimmy 'Barbecue' Cherizier leads the G9 gang alliance [Ralph Tedy Erol/Reuters]

Where did the gangs come from?

For decades, Haiti's gangs have been closely associated with politicians, political parties, businessmen or other so-called "elites" in the country.

G9, for example, has been linked to the Parti Haitien Tet Kale (PHTK), the political party of former President Jovenel Moise, who was [assassinated in July 2021](#). Moise chose Henry for the prime minister post shortly before he was killed.

For its part, GPep has been associated with Haitian opposition parties.

When did the gang violence start?

Most experts trace the phenomenon back to the era of Haiti's former President Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, whose combined dictatorship lasted 29 years.

The Duvaliers established and used a paramilitary group, the widely feared Tontons Macoutes, to stamp out opposition to their rule. The brigade killed and tortured thousands of people.

Robert Fatton, a Haiti expert and professor at the University of Virginia, said armed gangs are not a new phenomenon in Haiti. “They’ve been part of the history of the country for a very, very long time,” he told Al Jazeera.

But Fatton explained that the armed groups in Haiti today are different.

How so?

They have better weapons than before and have reached a new “level of sophistication” in their attacks, Fatton noted. For example, drones were reportedly used when gunmen [stormed two Port-au-Prince prisons](#) in early March, part of the latest round of violence.

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Fatton also explained that the armed groups were, “until fairly recently”, beholden to politicians, political parties and businessmen. Those individuals “could control them”, Fatton said. But that is no longer the case.

“They are a force unto themselves,” Fatton said. “That means they can essentially dictate to certain politicians or to many politicians, as it were, what they ought to do or what they can do.”

How did the gangs become autonomous?

“They’ve been able to amass much more money independently of politicians and businessmen,” said Fatton. That includes through extortion, as well as [kidnappings for ransom](#), drug trafficking and the smuggling of small weapons.

But both Fatton and de Alba stressed that Haitian armed groups are not only criminal in nature.

“They also have a political aspect,” de Alba told Al Jazeera. “They gain their income through illicit activities, and they are willing to use their arms for political purposes.”

So what do they want?

De Alba said Haiti’s major gangs have increasingly made political demands, particularly after the 2021 assassination of President Moise [left a power vacuum](#) in the country’s government.

The gangs’ most recent surge in violence, for instance, included a call for Prime Minister Henry to resign.

But their ambitions go further than that. For example, G9 chief Cherizier has warned that his forces will oppose any foreign intervention in Haiti, and he has said that he wants to

help lead the country out of its current crisis.

“These are groups that increasingly think that the only way to retain not only their relevance but their existence is if they are able to at least manage some important degree of political power,” said de Alba.

Fatton summarised the gangs’ long-term goals as one of enduring influence in Haiti’s leadership. “It’s not just, ‘Let me do what I want in terms of criminal activity.’ It’s more, ‘I want a piece of power.’ Period.”

OK. Knowing all this, how does Haiti go about tackling gang violence?

That’s the million-dollar question. And while there is no clear answer, most experts agree that you cannot divorce the problem of gang violence in Haiti from the overall political and economic situation.

The country is the poorest in Latin America and among the most unequal in terms of wealth distribution. It faces a number of systemic problems, such as high unemployment and a lack of opportunities, that contribute to the power of armed groups.

“A lot of youngsters and young men have no future, no jobs, no education. They really have no hope. You can understand why some of them join the gangs. That is a structural, social, economic problem,” said Fatton.

But while addressing those issues will require a long-term vision for the country, Fatton said there is a pressing need to re-establish order right now.

Violence has displaced more than 200,000 people in Port-au-Prince, and the Haitian police lack the resources to handle the gangs. The UN’s World Food Programme also [warned](#) this week that Haiti “is on the edge of a devastating hunger crisis”.



Police patrol a street in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on March 8 [Ralph Tedy Erol/Reuters]

Will the Kenya-led force be deployed?

That remains unclear, too. Kenyan officials said on Tuesday that the East African country was pausing the planned security mission to Haiti, in order to wait and see how the political transition plays out.

Kenyan President William Ruto [said](#) on Wednesday that his country “will take leadership” of the Haiti mission “as soon as the Presidential Council is in place under an agreed process”.

Haitian groups are in the process of choosing representatives to sit on the transitional presidential council, as set out by the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) bloc of nations, in terms [established](#) on Monday. The US, the UN and others were also party to those negotiations.

The transitional council will have seven voting members, chosen from various Haitian political factions and the private sector, and two non-voting observers. It will be tasked with choosing an interim prime minister.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters on Wednesday afternoon that Washington expects the transitional council to be formed “in the next couple of days”.

De Alba said that while “there is a need for a mechanism to strengthen the security situation in Haiti ... the gangs are so mixed in within the population that it’s going to be really tough for any multinational security mission to actually deal with them only by force”.

So what else needs to happen?

De Alba said the crisis must be addressed on dual tracks: security and politics.

“It’s a very challenging situation because, at the same time, Haiti has already had a very bad history of foreign intervention, which has led to nowhere,” he said. “It’s not a question [of] putting a lot of money on the table [and then] this will get solved.”

In de Alba’s opinion, Haitians need to take the lead in finding solutions — but they will also need help to set up functioning state institutions.

“If that doesn’t happen and if the government in place is not able to deliver for its people, then these gangs will continue to have the upper hand,” he said.

The need for stable leadership was echoed by Fatton. “It’s a very long road, but the immediate problem is the formation of the new government, the selection of a prime minister by the new government,” he said.

Then the next consideration, he added, will be addressing the gang violence.

“Can you have negotiations with the gangs? If you can’t have the negotiations with the gangs, will the Kenyans arrive on time and will they have the capacity to deal with them?”

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Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry released a video confirming he will step down.

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GANG VIOLENCE AND UNREST IN HAITI

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Overview

Haiti is in the grip of a severe humanitarian and human rights crisis. Armed gangs are striking the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area and its surroundings with terror and violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.

For years, the country has struggled with political instability, poverty, and natural disasters. However, an escalation in gang violence has pushed Haiti into a new era of insecurity, where armed gangs now control the majority of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The human rights consequences of the crisis are staggering. More than 5,600 people were reported killed amid the chaos in Haiti in 2024. Children are targeted and regularly exploited by gangs. Almost any street could become a battlefield. Food is scarce and half of the country's population face acute hunger.

Our researchers and campaigners work to expose human rights abuses in Haiti, push for justice and call for the protection of those most at risk.



©Giles Clarke/Getty Images

Gang Leader Jimmy 'Barbecue' Cherizier patrolling the streets with G-9 federation gang members in the Delmas 3 area on 22 February 2024, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

WHAT STARTED THE UNREST?

CHILDREN TRAPPED BY VIOLENCE

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What started the unrest?

Gang violence has long been a problem in Haiti, but it has worsened dramatically due to shifting power dynamics. This rise in gang activity has had devastating consequences for the country and its people, severely impacting human rights.

The situation escalated following the **assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021**, which left Haiti without effective leadership. Armed gangs capitalized on the power vacuum, using violence to expand their control over communities. An unchecked flow of illegal weapons and ammunition from other countries and weak law enforcement allow gangs to operate freely as they compete for control of territory.

By early 2024, gang activity had brought the capital to complete paralysis. Attacks on police stations, hospitals, neighbourhoods and essential infrastructure like ports and roads interrupted daily life, leaving millions in chaos and fear.

Political instability and economic hardship

For decades, Haiti has faced severe economic, political and social challenges that have deeply affected its political systems. These problems are rooted in Haiti's colonial

history of exploitation and slavery, which created long-term inequalities. Recent events, like fuel shortages, destructive earthquakes, tropical storms and the Covid-19 pandemic, have made the situation even worse, adding to the hardships that have ignited gang violence.

The assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 further destabilized the country. Moïse was replaced by acting prime minister Ariel Henry, but his government struggled to control the growing power of armed gangs. By 2023, these gangs controlled large swathes of Port-au-Prince. In early 2024, Henry resigned, and a transitional presidential council was established in an attempt to stabilize the nation.

Haitian authorities have a responsibility to protect human rights. Ensuring safety for all Haitians is essential, even in challenging times.

Unregulated arms trade

Gangs in Haiti rely on a variety of weapons and ammunition to commit human rights abuses. While exact data on the flow of arms into Haiti is unavailable, experts estimate that around **600,000 firearms are in circulation**. Gangs obtain these weapons by stealing from government supplies and smuggling arms from other countries.

Since 2023, importing firearms into Haiti has been banned, except for weapons and ammunition designated for use by the Haitian government or UN-authorized security forces. Because of Haiti's location, many illegal weapons are believed to come from the United States, where weak regulations on gun sales make it easier to buy and smuggle firearms.

While Haiti does not have any formal industrial weapons production, recent research suggests that craft-made, 3D-printed or converted blank guns are an increasing threat.



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A police officer stands by a wall painted with a mural of late Haitian President Jovenel Moïse after FBI agents and forensic teams conducted searches in his residence in Port-au-Prince on 15 July 2021, in the wake of his assassination on 7 July 2021.



An armed gang member on February 22, 2024 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Children trapped by violence

Haiti's escalating crisis has severely impacted its children, stripping them of safety, stability, and opportunities. Armed gangs recruit and use children into dangerous roles such as lookouts, couriers, and laborers. These children are often threatened with violence if they refuse to comply, leaving them trapped in fear.

The violence has also displaced hundreds of thousands of children and their families, forcing them into overcrowded sites with inadequate access to food, clean water, and healthcare. Many children are unable to attend school, disrupting their education and future prospects.

Beyond physical harm, the crisis has caused widespread distress. Children are growing up in constant fear, unable to play, learn, or thrive in a safe environment.

Recruitment and use of children

In Haiti, armed gangs are using children of all genders for a variety of purposes. These children are coerced into dangerous roles such as acting as lookouts, running errands, and carrying weapons. Many join out of fear for their lives or because of extreme poverty, leaving them little choice.

Once recruited, children face violence and threats, resulting in a loss of childhood and freedom. Some are exploited in criminal activities, placing them at risk of arrest and detention. This not only robs them of their future but also denies them access to education and safety. Communities also suffer as children are drawn into the cycle of violence. Protecting children from recruitment is essential to securing their well-being and Haiti's future.

Impact on children with disabilities

The current crisis has a disproportionate impact on children with disabilities. Many face added challenges in fleeing from violence due to mobility limitations and lack of assistive devices. In displacement sites, conditions are even more dire for these children, as resources like medical care, specialized equipment, and support services are scarce.

Without proper attention, these children risk being overlooked. Ensuring children with disabilities have equal access to safety, healthcare, and education is vital to upholding their rights and providing them a chance to thrive.

“

**This story is not the end of my life. My life can change. I hope
my life will change.**

Words of a boy who lost a leg after being shot by a sniper.

HAITI: THIS IS MY DREAM





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A 16-year-old boy, whose leg was amputated in January 2024 after he was shot by a gang member, was given crutches by an international NGO. By September, the crutches were falling apart, and he was unable to get new ones.

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Violence and killings

Widespread violence in Haiti has caused countless deaths and injuries, devastating families and entire communities. Armed gangs engage in random, indiscriminate shootings, trapping residents in the crossfire. They also carry out targeted attacks against communities. Children are especially at risk, with many injured or killed during these clashes.

The impact on families is immense. Those who lose loved ones are left to cope with lifelong distress, and the ongoing terror of continued attacks. Hospitals and healthcare facilities struggle to treat those affected due to limited resources and ongoing insecurity. The violence creates a sense of constant fear, leaving communities unable to rebuild or feel safe. Addressing this crisis is essential to saving lives, restoring peace and fostering hope for Haiti's future.

Mass killings

Mass killings driven by gang violence have devastated communities in Haiti. High-profile examples highlight the brutality and frequency of these large-scale attacks. In 2018, 71 people were killed in gang attacks on La Saline in Port-au-Prince. Residents were subjected to horrific violence, including dismemberment.

In 2024, 115 people were killed in an attack by the Gran Grif gang on the town of Pont-Sondé in October and 180 others, primarily older people, were killed in Cité Soleil in December in attacks ordered by a gang leader. Attacks like these are enabled by impunity and weak law enforcement.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence

Women and girls are particularly at risk of sexual violence, which gangs often use as a tool to intimidate and control communities. Girls face attacks while traveling to school, running errands, or even within their homes.

Survivors frequently face stigma, which discourages them from seeking help. This leaves them without medical care or psychological support, perpetuating their suffering. All states have a responsibility to end sexual and gender-based violence. It robs people of safety, dignity, and opportunities for the future. Tackling this issue is critical to breaking the cycle of violence and building a safer, more equitable Haiti.



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People walk past cars set on fire by armed gangs in the Poste Marchand area, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 10 December 2024. The Poste Marchand neighbourhood is one of the hardest hit areas. Following this tragic event, many families fled the area, joining thousands of displaced people seeking refuge in other parts of the capital.



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People are treated at the Doctors without Borders (MSF) Drouillard hospital in the Cite Soleil district of Port-au-Prince on 12 December 2024.

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Humanitarian crisis

The increase in gang violence in Haiti has created a profound humanitarian crisis, marked by widespread displacement and the collapse of essential services.

One million people have been displaced, half of whom are children. Many of those forced to flee their homes are living in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions without access to clean water, food and healthcare. 5.4 million people in Haiti, half of the total population, are living in acute hunger.

Healthcare facilities are under siege, as gangs target hospitals and clinics, forcing many to close. Members of gangs have murdered and kidnapped physicians, nurses and healthcare workers, creating an existential threat to Haitians' right to health. Meanwhile, Haiti is still recovering from the 2022 cholera outbreak. Without access to health services, Haitians are at greater risk of experiencing even more disease outbreaks.



©REUTERS/Marckinson Pierre

People walk on the street as residents flee the neighbourhood of Nazon due to gang violence, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on 14 November 2024.

Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (MSS)

In October 2023, the UN Security Council authorized an international force to be dispatched to Haiti, called the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (MSS). This mission is led by Kenya and supported by the United States and other countries. The main goal is to disarm gangs and stabilize the country. Kenyan police forces began arriving in Haiti in June 2024 and subsequent deployments of security forces followed from other countries, including Jamaica, Belize, the Bahamas, Guatemala and El Salvador.

The establishment of the mission was met with caution by human rights groups, citing widespread human rights violations and impunity during previous foreign security missions to Haiti. Despite some efforts to communicate and liaise with civil society, the mission has so far failed to **address serious concerns about transparency and human rights safeguards**.

Amnesty International is calling on the MSS to ensure that it upholds human rights safeguards. The organization is also calling on the mission to release more details about how it will address risks and ensure that human rights are respected throughout its operations.

HaitiTPSAR000582



Kenyan police arrive in Haiti to join UN-backed multinational force against armed criminal gangs.

What is Amnesty International doing to help?

Our researchers and campaigners are working hard to advocate for the protection of human rights in Haiti by documenting and exposing abuses and violations, including those linked to gang violence. We are partnering with local Haitian organizations to amplify their voices and create long-lasting solutions to ensure the safety and well-being of all Haitians.

We are calling on the Haitian government to take decisive action. They must develop and implement a comprehensive child protection plan to safeguard and prevent further violence against children and provide victims with rehabilitation and other necessary care. The government must also bring an end to impunity for human rights violations by holding anyone suspected of criminal responsibility to account in fair trials and creating a framework that guarantees protections for those most at risk, including children.

The international community must provide technical and financial assistance to Haitian authorities to support human rights-based initiatives. Amnesty International also calls



Senior Crisis Advisor Rawya Rageh interviewing a girl who was displaced by gang violence in Port-au-Prince. 24 September 2024.

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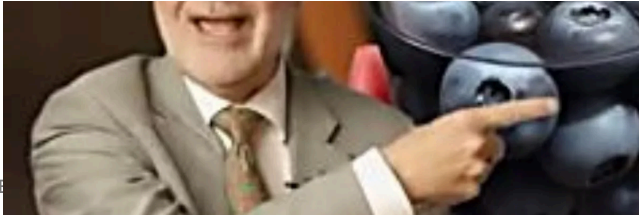
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WORLD NEWS

With fear and hope, Haiti warily welcomes new governing council as gang-ravaged country seeks peace

BY **DÁNICA COTO**
Updated 7:28 PM EDT, April 25, 2024

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti opened a new political chapter Thursday with the installation of a transitional council tasked to pick a new prime minister and prepare for eventual presidential elections, in hopes of quelling [spiraling gang violence](#) that has killed thousands in the Caribbean country.

Ariel Henry, the prime minister who had been locked out of the country for the past couple of months due to the violence, cleared the way for the transition by presenting his resignation in a letter signed in Los Angeles.

The document was released Thursday in Haiti on the same day as the new transitional council was sworn in to choose a new prime minister and Cabinet. Henry's outgoing Cabinet chose Economy and Finance Minister Michel Patrick Roisvert as interim prime minister in the meantime. It was not immediately clear when the

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The council was officially sworn in at the National Palace in downtown Port-au-Prince early Thursday as the pop of sporadic gunfire erupted nearby, prompting some officials to look around the room. The council had been urged to seek a safer venue because [gangs have launched daily attacks in the area](#).

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UN finds that gang violence displaced a record 1.3 million people in Haiti

Addressing a crowded and sweaty room in the prime minister's office hours later in Pétion-Ville, Boisvert said that Haiti's crisis had gone on too long and that the country now found itself at a crossroads. The members of the transitional council stood behind him, and before him, the country's top police and military officials as well as ambassadors and well-known politicians.

"After long months of debate ... a solution has been found," Boisvert said. "Today is an important day in the life of our dear republic."

He called the transitional council a "Haitian solution" and directing his remarks toward them, Boisvert wished them success, adding, "You are to lead the country to peace, to economic and social recovery, to sacred union, to participation."

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After the speeches, the soft clink of glasses echoed in the room as attendees served champagne flutes toasted with a somber "To Haiti."

The council was installed earlier Thursday, more than a month after Caribbean leaders announced its creation following an emergency meeting to tackle [Haiti's spiraling crisis](#). Gunfire heard as the council was sworn in at the National Palace prompted worried looks.

The nine-member council, of which seven have voting powers, is also expected to help set the agenda of a new Cabinet. It will also appoint a provisional electoral commission, a requirement before elections can take

place, and establish a national security council.

The council's non-renewable mandate expires Feb. 7, 2026, at which date a new president is scheduled to be sworn in.

The council members are Emmanuel Vertilaire for Petit Desalin, a party led by former senator and presidential candidate Jean-Charles Moïse; Smith Augustin for EDE/RED, a party led by former Prime Minister Claude Joseph; Fritz Alphonse Jean for the Montana Accord, a group of civil society leaders, political parties and others; Leslie Voltaire for Fanmi Lavalas, the party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide; Louis Gérald Gilles for the Dec. 21 coalition that backs former Prime Minister Ariel Henry; Edgard Leblanc Fils for the Jan. 30 Collective, which represents parties including that of former President Michel Martelly; and Laurent Saint-Cyr for the private sector.

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The two non-voting seats were awarded to Frinel Joseph, a pastor, and Régine Abraham, a former World Bank and Haitian government official.

Augustin, one of the council's voting members, said that it was unclear if the council would decide to keep Boisvert on as interim prime minister or choose another. He said it would be discussed in the coming days. "The crisis is unsustainable," he said.

Abraham, a nonvoting member, recalled the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, explaining that "that violence had a devastating impact."

Abraham said that gangs now controlled most of Port-au-Prince, tens of thousands of the capital's residents have been displaced by violence and more than 900 schools in the capital have been forced to close.

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"The population of Port-au-Prince has literally been taken hostage," she said.

Gangs launched coordinated attacks that began on Feb. 29 in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and surrounding areas. They burned police stations and hospitals, opened fire on the main international airport that has

remained closed since early March and stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates. Gangs also have severed access to Haiti's biggest port.

The onslaught began while Prime Minister Henry was on an official visit to Kenya to push for a [U.N.-backed deployment of a police force](#) from the East African country.

In his resignation letter, Henry said Haiti would be reborn. "We served the nation in difficult times," he wrote. "I sympathize with the losses and suffering endured by our compatriots during this period."

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He remains locked out of Haiti.

"Port-au-Prince is now almost completely sealed off because of air, sea and land blockades," Catherine Russell, UNICEF's director, said earlier this week.

The international community has urged the council to prioritize Haiti's widespread insecurity. Even before the attacks began, gangs already controlled 80% of Port-au-Prince. More than 2,500 people were killed or injured from January to March, up by more than 50% compared with the same period last year, according to a recent U.N. report.

"It is impossible to overstate the increase in gang activity across Port-au-Prince and beyond, the deterioration of the human rights situation and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis," María Isabel Salvador, the U.N. special envoy for Haiti, said at a U.N. Security Council meeting on Monday.

On Thursday, some Haitians said they didn't know that the country had a new prime minister and a transitional council in place. Others warily celebrated the new leadership.

"We don't ask for much. We just want to move about freely," said Guismet Obaubourg, owner of a dusty convenience store who lamented that his merchandise has been stuck at the port for two months.

As for Boisvert: "I don't know him personally, but as long as he does what he's supposed to do, provide security to the country, that's all that matters."

In attendance at Boisvert's swearing in Thursday was Dennis Hankins, the newly installed U.S. ambassador. He said Thursday's events were an important step for Haiti.

"In crisis, the Haitians are able to do tremendous things, so we're here to help them," Hankins said. "We won't be the solution, but hopefully we will be part of helping those finding the solution."

As part of that, he said the U.S. government was working to enforce export controls on weapons, many of which have found their way to Haiti, fueling the violence.

"The fact that many of the arms that come here are from the United States is indisputable and that has a direct impact," Hankins said. "It is something we recognize is a contributing factor to instability."

Nearly 100,000 people have fled the capital in search of safer cities and towns since the attacks began. Tens of thousands of others left homeless after gangs torched their homes are now living in crowded, makeshift shelters across Port-au-Prince that only have one or two toilets for hundreds of residents.

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At the United Nations Thursday, World Food Program Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said Haiti is suffering from a security, political and humanitarian crisis that is causing acute food insecurity for some 5 million people, or about half the population. The U.N. defines that as “when a person’s inability to consume adequate food puts their lives or livelihoods in immediate danger.”

“The situation is dramatic,” Skau told reporters. “Devastating crisis, a massive humanitarian impact, the worst humanitarian situation in Haiti since the [2010 earthquake](#).”

Rachel Pierre, a 39-year-old mother of four children, living in one of the capital’s makeshift shelters, said, “Although I’m physically here, it feels like I’m dead.”

“There is no food or water. Sometimes I have nothing to give the kids,” she said as her 14-month-old suckled on her deflated breast.

Many Haitians are angry and exhausted at what their lives have become and blame gangs for their situation.

“They’re the ones who sent us here,” said Chesnel Joseph, a 46-year-old math teacher whose school closed because of the violence and who has become the shelter’s informal director. “They mistreat us. They kill us. They burn our homes.”

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WORLD NE

Transitional council in Haiti to choose new leaders is formally established amid gang violence



BY EVENS SANON AND DÁNICA COTO

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A transitional council tasked with choosing Haiti's next prime minister and Cabinet was established Friday in a move supporters hope will help quell turmoil in the troubled Caribbean country where most of the capital [remains under the grip of criminal gangs](#).

The formation of the council, announced in a decree published Friday in a Haitian government gazette, was expected to soon trigger [the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry](#), but a new provision said he would step down when a new premier is chosen. Henry did not immediately comment.

Those awarded a seat on the council are Petit Desalin, a party led by former senator and presidential candidate Jean-Charles Moïse; EDF/RED, a party led by former Prime Minister Claude Joseph; the Montana

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President Jean-Bertrand Aristide; the Jan. 30 Collective, which represents parties including that of former President Michel Martelly; and the private sector.

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The two non-voting seats are represented by someone from Haiti's civil society and its religious sector.

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“The establishment of the...politically inclusive council signals the possibility of a new beginning for Haiti,” a Caribbean trade bloc known as Caricom, who helped form the council, said in a statement.

It said that the council “will take the troubled country through elections to the restoration of the lapsed state institutions and constitutional government.”

“It is also clear that one of the first priorities of the newly installed Presidential Council will be to urgently address the security situation so that Haitians can go about their daily lives in a normal manner; safely access food, water and medical services; children can return to school; women can move around without fear of horrific abuses; and so that businesses can reopen,” Caricom said.

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Carl-Henry Joseph, a 42-year-old street vendor, said he heard that the council was established thanks to a small radio he balances atop loaves of bread he sells out of a wheelbarrow.

“I’m not going to call it comforting news. There are still gunshots,” he said. “I don’t know if the council will be able to solve Haiti’s problems.”

But Joseph was trying to remain optimistic: “For now, that’s all we have.”

The published decree acknowledged what it called “a multidimensional crisis” that has worsened since the July [2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse](#). It said the crisis has led to a “catastrophic humanitarian

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situation” and that Haiti is experiencing “unprecedented institutional dysfunction, which has led to a political impasse.”

It also noted that Henry would present his resignation once a new prime minister is appointed.

The decree, which was signed by Henry and his Cabinet, noted that no one can be a member of the council if they have been sanctioned by the U.N., oppose the deployment of a foreign armed force or plan to run in the next general election, among other conditions.

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While an election date hasn't been set, the decree stated that the president-elect must be sworn-in on Feb. 7, 2026 at the latest, and that the council will exercise presidential powers until then.

The council also will be responsible for helping set the agenda of a new Cabinet and will appoint members to form a provisional electoral council, which is needed before elections are held. It also will establish a national security council whose responsibilities have not been decided.

The decree does not set any deadlines for choosing a new prime minister or Cabinet, stating only that the council must “quickly” do so.

The council will be based at the National Palace, and its mandate is supposed to end when a new president is sworn-in, with no possibility of extension.

The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti posted on X that it would continue to closely follow the political process as it called for international support for Haiti's National Police, saying it is “essential to restore security and the rule of law.”

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“We reaffirm our commitment to supporting the country's institutions in their efforts to restore democratic institutions,” María Isabel Salvador, the U.N. special envoy for Haiti, said in a statement.

The council's creation comes exactly a month and one day after Caribbean leaders announced plans to help form the nine-member panel, with seven members awarded voting powers.

transitional council in Haiti to choose new leaders is formally established amid gang violence. AP News

Friday's development was cheered by those who believe the council could help steer Haiti in a new direction and help quell [widespread gang violence](#) that has paralyzed swaths of the capital of Port-au-Prince for more than a month.

More than 1,550 people have been killed across Haiti and more than 820 injured from January to March 22, according to the U.N.

In addition, gang violence has forced nearly 95,000 people to flee Port-au-Prince in the span of one month, with more than half of them having previously been left homeless as gunmen raze neighborhoods, the U.N.'s International Organization for Migration said Friday.

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While gangs have long operated throughout Haiti, gunmen organized large-scale attacks starting Feb. 29. They burned police stations, opened fire on the main international airport that remains closed and raided the country's two biggest prisons, freeing more than 4,000 inmates.

The attacks were meant to prevent the return of Henry to Haiti. At the time, he was in Kenya pushing for the U.N.-backed deployment of a police force from the East African country. [He remains locked out of Haiti.](#)

While the violence has somewhat subsided, gangs are still launching attacks throughout Port-au-Prince, especially in the downtown area, where they have seized control of Haiti's biggest public hospital.

Joseph, the street vendor, said his family is in constant danger and that he hopes the council "can deliver something for the country."

"If they can bring stability so that everyone can get back to their homes and out of the shelters, and if the multinational force can come in and stabilize ... the country, that would be a step forward," he said. "Today, Haiti is in the dark. We don't know if the sunlight will come through. I'm hoping for the best."

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Coto reported from San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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